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Teaser

[image]

***

"Mist shall shroud,
"Darkness shall rise,
"Stars covered by cloud,
"The land around dies,
"Thrown into terror,
"No one alive,
"Unless broken hearts repair,
"And three survive."

***

"And what if he does not trust *me*?"
"Then *make* him trust you."

***

The gray-and-white kit didn't notice the amber eyes glowing in front of him until he ran straight into the dark shape.
"I am *he."* The dark form slipped into the shadows, and the small tom was alone.

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"H'it's just the three o' h'us!" The black tom narrowed his blue eyes to slits. The smaller tom looked away.
"Two of us." He muttered, and followed the black tom.

***

"Besides, we could be warriors by now." She stopped and looked away. "Did I share too much?"

***

She looked at him, disappointed. "I thought StarClan was full of experienced warriors, not foolish kits who sell themselves to their father just to be able to live again. Look around, kit, look what you've done. You've ruined the lives of many cats, just to 'live a life.' When will you learn that your father isn't what he makes himself out to be? Trust me, I fell for him, too!

"That's why I broke, and had to turn to my first love again. Look around, *look* around. I'm broken, my son, and I know it. I'm trying to fix myself, trying to fix our family, trying to cover up the brokenness inside, trying not to be vulnerable to that—that *rat.* I'm trying, and I know I'm not perfect, but I'm trying my hardest, son, to fix everything. Just, please, don't fall for that tom like I did. Please, my son, please." Her voice was reduced to a whisper, and the dark tabby beside her simply glanced away.

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"It's up to you to fix the mistakes. You made them, now you have to fix them. Never forget, there's a hidden reed out there. Never forget."

***

"I can't, I can't just...I'm bound by a code...I can't. I'm sorry, but I...I don't know." She was crying at this point, her whole body shaking.

"I'm sorry." He stared down at his paws.

"I knew I couldn't trust you." He glared at her and padded away.

***

"I will find him, and I will *make* him pay. Look what he's done to me. *Look*." The dark tom was held back by tendrils that snaked around, snaring him in a makeshift prison, but he still tried to lunge forward. The she-cat flinched and turned away.

***

"They became the Advisory as you know it: corrupt control-freaks."

***

"We have a chance to undo them? Please, won't you help? Help me,

help *everyone*. We need your help." He reached a paw up, but she didn't help him.
"You really are naive and gullible, aren't you? You actually *believed* that I loved you. I only love my masters and their mission." She sneered, and batted his paw away. He slipped a little. Her unseeing blue eyes glinted. "Good luck getting up." She smirked and walked off, her stark white tail held high. He slipped again, unable to hold on. With a small squeak, he slipped off the edge, plummeting toward the current below.

***

Note

This is Book 2 of The Coming Night. If you have not read Book 1, *River*, then turn back!

Now, here is a brief recap of *River* to refresh your memory if you need it:

The book starts off with Sunkit opening his eyes and walking for the first time. Later, his mother dies and he is heartbroken. Brackenstar visits the Advisory (see *River* trivia) and gets attacked by his arch-nemesis, Darkmist. Riverstorm gets abused by Cranestar and finds out his best friend has a crush on him. Sunpaw is made an apprentice, and he has a weird vision. He is made a medicine cat apprentice, which he hates. Brackenstar recovers in ThunderClan, and he meets a very depressed Sunpaw. Riverstorm meets a very rude WindClan warrior, and Cranestar attacks him. He runs for his life.
Sunpaw runs away and tries to drown himself, but Brackenstar saves him after dropping his newborn kits off at ThunderClan's camp. Their mother dies. Sunpaw and Brackenstar are captured by a group of she-cats called the Descendants. Riverstorm is too. Cranestar comes to find Riverstorm, but Brackenstar fights him and sacrifices his own lives for the rest of the group. Riverstorm, too, fights him, and Cranestar and Darkmist run away. Riverstorm almost dies, but Mossypaw nurses him back to health. Riverstorm has a dream from StarClan, and they all go to the ThunderClan camp. Brackenstar says goodbye to them before going back to StarClan. It is revealed that Brackenstar and Lightstar are brothers. The book ends with Sunpaw being made a warrior apprentice again, Brackenstar being welcomed to StarClan, and Riverstorm and his best friend, Sorrelstream, become mates, when Riverstorm returns home again. Cranestar and Darkmist are still missing, though.

Thanks for coming, and enjoy the story!

Allegiances

THUNDERCLAN
Leader Lightstar- pure white tom with green eyes

Deputy Stormheart- gray tom with green eyes

Medicine Cat Willowleaf- pale brown she-cat with amber eyes
Barkpelt- dark brown tabby tom with golden yellow eyes

Warriors Icewing- white she-cat with black paws, ear-tips, and tail-tip with one blue eye and one green eye
Flamepelt- pale orange tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Lionpaw
Whitetail- reddish-brown she-cat with a white tail-tip and hazel eyes
Tigerstripe- a dark tabby tom with yellow eyes
Foxcatcher- a flaming orange tom with pale green eyes
Ashclaw- pale gray tabby tom with copper eyes
Oakpool- dark brown mackerel tabby with lemon yellow eyes
Apprentice, Dewpaw
Russetbreeze- russet colored tom with amber eyes
Cheetahstride- yellow spotted tabby tom with brown eyes
Apprentice, Moonpaw
Mouseblaze- pale brown ticked tabby she-cat with yellow eyes
Briarpool- tortoiseshell she-cat with hazel eyes
Apprentice, Sunpaw
Dustwind- dusky brown tom with pale brown eyes
Apprentice, Splashpaw
Darkpounce- black she-cat with pale yellow eyes
Redfoot- pale brown tom with one reddish foot and yellow eyes
Raincloud- pale gray she-cat with blue eyes
Pinefrost- dark gray she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Sparrowpaw
Littleleaf- tortoiseshell she-cat with hazel eyes

Apprentices Moonpaw- pure white tom with blue eyes, deaf in one

ear
Sunpaw- golden tom with amber eyes
Lionpaw- golden tom with green eyes
Sparrowpaw- tortoiseshell tom with green eyes
Splashpaw- gray-blue tom with blue eyes
Dewpaw- pale gray she-cat with green eyes

Queens Sandypelt- pale brown she-cat with green eyes (Mother to Redfoot's kits)
Hollypelt- black she-cat with green eyes (Mother to Flamepelt's kits, Snowkit- calico she-kit with green eyes, Fluffkit- fluffy black tom with green eyes)

Elders Smalltail- ancient dark brown tom with copper eyes
One-ear- golden she-cat with blue eyes
Stoneclaw- gray tom with amber eyes

RIVERCLAN

Acting Leader Oneleg- black tom with one white paw and hazel eyes

Acting Deputy Riverstorm- massive dark gray, almost black tom with Pacific blue eyes

Medicine Cat Birdtail- tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes
Thrushsong- calico tom with pale green eyes

Warriors Twistedclaw- pale gray tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Daisypaw
Tornclaw- gray mackerel tabby tom with yellow eyes
Bluetail- blue-gray she-cat with blue eyes
Flashmask- white tom with a dark gray face and chest with blue eyes
Sleekpelt- black she-cat with yellow eyes
Jaystorm- dark gray tom with green eyes
Peachlight- black she-cat with orange eyes
Apprentice, Lilypaw
Lilyleaf- flaming orange she-cat with pale green eyes
Flintheart- light gray tom with hazel eyes

Blackfur- black tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Daffodilpaw
Sandtail- sandy-gray she-cat with green eyes
Grassjump- pale brown she-cat with amber eyes
Whitestrike- blue-gray she-cat with a white spot on her forehead and striking green eyes
Mistyflight- pale gray she-cat with white patches and pale blue eyes

Apprentices Daisypaw- golden she-cat with blue eyes
Lilypaw- golden she-cat with amber eyes
Daffodilpaw- golden she-cat with green eyes

Queens Mouseleaf- brown she-cat with yellow eyes (Mother to Jaystorm's kit, Stemkit- brown tom with green eyes)
Pantherfur- black she-cat with Pacific blue eyes (Mother to Twistedclaw's kits, Foxkit- gray tabby tom with blue eyes, Bramblekit- black tom with yellow eyes)
Sorrelstream- pale gray tabby she-cat with amber eyes (Mother to Riverstorm's kits)

Elders Hollyheart- light brown tom with hazel eyes
Frostkit- deaf and blind white tom with blue eyes
Leopardwhisker- leopard spotted yellow she-cat with amber eyes

SHADOWCLAN

Leader Swiftstar- black-and-white tom with orange eyes

Deputy Feathermoss- pale gray tom with ice blue eyes

Medicine Cat Finchnose- dark brown tom with yellow eyes

Warriors Crowwing- black tom with green eyes
Nectarflight- dark gray agouti tabby she-cat with pale green eyes
Frogleap- pale brown tom with ginger patches and green eyes
Apprentice, Fawnpaw
Alderfern- brown ticked tabby tom with hazel eyes
Adderheart- gray-and-white tom with green eyes
Ginger (Former kittypet) - ginger she-cat with amber eyes

Apprentice, Archpaw
Nightmoon- tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes
Ravenlight- deaf white tom with blue eyes
Yarrowcloud- yellow she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Otterpaw
Acorntail- reddish-brown she-cat with golden yellow eyes
Tawnysnow- white she-cat with amber eyes
Minnowsparks- blue-gray she-cat with deep blue eyes and darker stripe along her back
Stripeface- silver-gray tom with dark stripes along his back and blue eyes
Weedstrike- yellow tom with amber eyes

Apprentices Fawnpaw- calico she-cat with yellow eyes
Archpaw- gray tom with hazel eyes
Otterpaw- gray-and-white she-cat with blue eyes

Queens Cherryblossom- tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes (Mother to Weedstrike's kits)
Petalheart- calico she-cat with pale brown eyes with darker flecks in them (Mother to Crowwing's kits, Snowykit- white she-kit with black paws, and pale brown eyes, Twigkit- black she-kit with pale brown eyes with darker flecks in them)

Elders Orchidpelt- tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes
Larchbelly- black tom with blue eyes
Vinestripes- pale gray tom with pale green eyes

WINDCLAN

Leader Badgerstar- black-and-white tom with hazel eyes

Deputy Sageflame- fiery orange she-cat with emerald green eyes
Apprentice, Shrewpaw

Medicine Cat Deerstep- dark brown tabby she-cat with copper eyes
Ryegaze- reddish-brown tom with amber eyes

Warriors Smallclaw- small white tom with red splotches and pale green eyes

Sandfang- sandy tom with brown eyes; unusually long front tooth
Apprentice, Runningpaw
Dewspeck- brown tabby tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Rookpaw
Loudwhistle- deep brown tom with yellow eyes
Tangleclaw- gray tom with white patches and pale blue eyes; clumsy, hence his name
Apprentice, Hailpaw
Bumbleshine- blue-gray she-cat with blue eyes
Honeysong- honey-colored she-cat with warm amber eyes
Hawkflight- dark brown tabby tom with yellow-orange eyes
Shimmersplash- silvery gray she-cat with blue eyes
Cedarstep- brown she-cat with copper eyes

Apprentices Rookpaw- black tom with yellow eyes
Shrewpaw- brown tom with yellow eyes
Runningpaw- dark gray tom with yellow eyes
Hailpaw- silver tom with blue eyes

Queens Tansyfrost- yellow she-cat with amber eyes (Mother to Dewspeck's kit, Snakekit- yellow tom with yellow eyes)

Elders Blizzardpelt- white tom with one blue eye and one green eye
Rabbithop- orange agouti tabby tom with green eyes

SKYCLAN

Leader Shellstar- silvery gray she-cat with pale blue eyes

Deputy Pebblefall- dark gray, spike-furred she-cat with a white tail-tip and blue eyes

Medicine Cat Bloomshade- tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes
Mossyheart- beautiful ticked tabby she-cat with warm hazel eyes

Warriors Scorchstripe- bright orange tom with a large black stripe across his back and yellow eyes
Timbernose- brown tabby tom with amber eyes
Talonstrike- large pale gray-and-white tom with pale green eyes

Starlingflight- pale brown tom with cool amber eyes
Apprentice, Wolfpaw
Weaselspeck- dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes
Nutleg- dark brown tom with white patches and dark brown, almost black eyes
Fallowspot- white she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Patchpaw
Beesplotch- orange-and-white tom with green eyes
Jaggedstrike- pale gray-and-white tom with blue eyes; blind in one eye
Apprentice, Mistpaw

Apprentices Mistpaw- bright orange she-cat with green eyes
Wolfpaw- cream tom with green eyes
Patchpaw- ginger-and-orange she-cat with green eyes

Queens Mistpelt- pale gray she-cat with one white paw and yellow eyes (Mother to Weaselspeck's kits)

Elders Goldenspring- golden she-cat with amber eyes

THE ADVISORY

ThunderClan- Eaglefall- large golden tom with one blue eye and one green eye, forty-seven moons
RiverClan- Feathergaze- pale gray tom with sky-blue eyes, twenty-two moons
ShadowClan- Hickoryshine- white-and-gray patched she-cat with gray-blue eyes, seventy-two moons
WindClan- Rosepatch- cream-colored she-cat with a red splotch on her cheek and green eyes, twenty-four moons
SkyClan- Speckleheart- spotted tabby tom with amber eyes, twenty-nine moons
Apprentices Turtlepaw- tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes, twenty-three moons
Hazelpaw- pale brown she-cat with hazel eyes, fifteen moons
Pearpaw- yellow she-cat with hazel eyes, forty-four moons
Swallowpaw-white she-cat with green eyes, eighteen moons
Reedpaw- white tom with green eyes, twenty moons
Kits Heatherkit- dusky she-cat with green eyes, fourteen moons

Cloudkit- white tom with blue eyes, seven moons
Leopardkit- leopard spotted she-cat with amber eyes, thirty-six moons
Cricketkit- black she-cat with orange eyes, sixteen moons
Lunakit- white she-cat with blind, dark blue eyes, thirteen moons
Hollowkit- sandy brown she-cat with green eyes, eight moons
Petalkit- white-and-orange patched she-cat, ten moons
Hillkit- tortoiseshell tom with yellow eyes, forty-seven moons
Fernkit- pale gray she-cat with one green eye and one blue eye, twenty-one moons
Rowankit- reddish she-cat with amber eyes, fourteen moons
Meadowkit- dark gray she-cat with one white ear and a white chest, and green eyes, nineteen moons
Larkkit- black tom with blue eyes, twenty moons
Wildkit- dark brown tabby tom with one blue eye and one amber eye, seventeen moons
Birchkit- white-and-black tom with blue eyes, thirty-one moons
Doekit- pale brown she-cat with copper eyes, twelve moons

CATS OUTSIDE THE CLANS

Darkmist- dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes
Mapletuft- small, dark ginger she-cat with copper eyes
Cranestar- orange-and-white tom with green eyes

Prologue

"Look, kit. We both know you have something that I want. We both know you're trying to hide it. We both know that I will do anything it takes to get it." The dark tom looked even darker in the shadows. His amber eyes gleamed at the tom in front of him. The tom looked to be different shades of gray in the shadows, though he was actually a smoky gray and white. The smaller tom growled.

"How do you know *I* have it?" He asked. "What if I don't?" The dark tom laughed.

"Oh, you have it all right." He swished his tail back and forth. "I keep tabs on you, along with many others, including my own colleague. Or, shall I say, 'assistant.'" The gray-and-white tom just shook his head.

"You cannot truly have friends if you don't trust them." He said, rather wisely for the age he seemed to be. The dark tom bared his teeth.

"And what if he does not trust *me*, O Wise One?" He mocked. He sniffed haughtily, and folded his tail over his paws, trying to look dignified. The smaller tom looked him straight in the eye.

"Then *make* him trust you."

***

The dark brown tom's eyes unfocused.

"Mist shall shroud,
"Darkness shall rise,
"Stars covered by cloud,
"The land around dies,
"Thrown into terror,

"No one alive,
"Unless broken hearts repair,
"And three survive."

The tom's eyes focused again. He looked at the small, ginger she-cat in front of him. "I'm sorry, I zoned out for a second. Now, where was I?" The ginger she-cat narrowed her eyes.

"You were about to give me information on a small, white tom." She decided not to mention the prophecy. *Better to keep such things to one's self,* she thought. Little did she know, the smoky gray-and-white tom was watching, and heard the whole prophecy. He sat, listening as the dark brown tom told the she-cat where he had last seen the white tom.

"I saw him on his way to the RiverClan camp, accompanied by a dark tabby tom, identical to who I believe is his father." The dark brown tom looked away. The ginger she-cat laughed.

"Your assumption is correct, my friend." Her copper eyes gleamed. She turned to leave the den, but the tom stopped her. His fur bristled slightly.

"I smell another cat. It smells like *him*, but not quite. It's sweeter, younger, somehow." He sniffed around, and she did, too. The gray-and-white tom rose quickly and turned to leave as well, but a cat stood there, blocking his path.

"Go in. Tell them *he* is on his way. Tell them *I* am on my way, and we will be arriving shortly." The large tom circled around the small tom. "You know my name, don't you?" He didn't wait for a reply, but slunk off into the shadows. The small tom trembled before turning to go inside the den. He stopped as the brown tom and ginger she-cat stared at him.

"Erm, well, you see...*he* is on his way, and so is *I*." He curled his tail in embarrassment. The brown tom, however, looked at the she-cat in terror.

"You have to go! I will tell them nothing, not even that *you* were

here, kit!" He raced around pulling out a few herbs to pretend to tidy. He shooed the other two out of the den. "Go! You must be quick! Kit, if caught you here, you would never see another sunrise." His eyes were filled with panic. "Go!"

The gray-and-white 'kit' turned and ran. *Who is* he*? Who is* I*? Why are they so scared?* He didn't notice the amber eyes glowing in front of him until he ran straight into the dark shape.

"I am *he*. They are scared, because I know about everything that happens. I told you I keep tabs." The dark form slipped into the shadows, and the small tom was alone.

"Should I Tell Them?"

•Reedpaw•

Reedpaw yawned and stretched. He jumped when he saw Larkkit and Wildkit, his two best friends, standing above him. They both laughed. Reedpaw growled jokingly and leapt at them. They bowled him over easily; kits were fed better than apprentices. *If only we were in the Clans, we could already be warriors. Chances are most of us never become apprentices, let alone Advisors, and we'll be sent off to live away from the Clans.* Reedpaw had only been an apprentice for four moons. His mentor had only become a full Advisor four moons ago, as well. Reedpaw was twenty moons old, and so was Larkkit. Wildkit was three moons younger than them.

They had first become friends the moon Wildkit came to the Advisory. Wildkit had accidentally tripped on Larkkit's tail, and knocked into, then, Reedkit. Reedkit had just laughed and helped both of them back up. Wildkit had stuck to him like glue from then on, and Larkkit had followed them around. Reedkit finally just started hanging out with them, and now they were all close friends. Larkkit was from RiverClan, Wildkit was born in WindClan, and Reedpaw came from SkyClan. Larkkit was all black with blue eyes, Wildkit was brown tabby with one blue eye and one amber eye, and Reedpaw was pure white with green eyes. They were all so different, but they had one thing in common: They all thought that the Advisory was unfair, and they should get to live their normal lives and remember their families. They all wanted to escape together, but now that Reedpaw was an apprentice, they couldn't do it just yet.

They were waiting for the day when Reedpaw became an Advisor. Reedpaw would have more power then, and he could train his own apprentice to know the truth. His mentor, Speckleheart, was a rather horrid tom who kept Reedpaw in the dark about pretty much

everything that happened. Reedpaw was pretty sure that Speckleheart took after his *own* mentor: Darkmist. Nearly every cat around knew Darkmist's name, and feared him. The only cats who didn't fear him were the other Advisors, especially Eaglefall.

Larkkit shook him. "Reed! Where h'you h'at, sir? Wild was tryna tell h'you summat important. Listen h'up, sir!" He shook Reedpaw again. "Brotheh! Listen!" Larkkit had a funny way of talking, where he added an 'h' in front of words that didn't start with one. Reedpaw couldn't help the sparkle in his eye when Larkkit talked. Wildkit apparently couldn't either, because he burst out laughing when he and Reedpaw made eye-contact.

"S—sorry, Lark. Ha—er, it's nothin'." Wildkit turned away. Larkkit glared at him.

"H'is summat funny, sir?" Larkkit looked at him suspiciously. He also called everyone 'sir' or 'ma'am'.

"Hey, Wild, what were you trying to tell me?" Reedpaw attempted to change the conversation for the sake of the very disgruntled looking black tom. Wildkit guffawed again.

"Er—ha—yeah...well see, Lark and I were hunting, and we just 'happened' to hear a conversation between Speckleheart and that dark ginger she-cat that was replaced by Feathergaze. What's her name?" Wildkit looked to the white tom for answers. Reedpaw thought hard.

"I think...Mapletuft?" He replied. "Yeah, Mapletuft."

"That sounds right. So Lark and I heard Mapletuft and Speckleheart talking, and we were both blown away by what we heard." Wildkit looked ecstatic, and Larkkit nodded.

"We h'uns heard tha' they a-gonna take control h'of the H'advisory h'again. They're planning fo' the new moon, when h'it's h'all dark h'out." Larkkit butted in, clearly as excited as Wildkit was. Wildkit didn't even seem to care that he had been interrupted; that was one of his biggest pet-peeves.

"Yeah, and we thought that that would be the perfect night to escape, just the three of us." Wildkit was practically dancing on his paws. Reedpaw rolled his eyes.

"Okay, okay. Calm down, you two. Okay...just the three of us..." Reedpaw thought for a moment. He still hadn't let his best friends in on the fact that he was rather fond of a she-cat. He hadn't told them for fear it would interfere with their trio, but now, he knew he couldn't just escape without taking her. "Can we make it four?" He asked, a little quieter and shakier than he meant to. His friends stared at him.

"H'is there h'a fourth h'one o' h'us, sir?" Larkkit looked rather angry, but Wildkit seemed simply astonished.

"A fourth one...Reed, you aren't fond of...your mentor or...fellow apprentices, are you?" Wildkit asked. Reedpaw let out the breath he had been holding while Wildkit talked. He didn't feel ready to share about Lunakit.

"No, I'm not...it's just...it feels wrong to leave everyone else here in this...this prison. Perhaps we shouldn't escape just yet, but simply help keep Mapletuft out of here." Reedpaw was aware that they were sitting in the Circle of Truth, so he chose his words carefully. Wildkit's eyes grew even wider, but it was a furious Larkkit who answered him.

"This h'is h'our h'one chance to get h'out o' here! H'and what do h'you want to do?! H'you want to bring someone else, h'or just botch the h'entire plan! H'it's the three o' h'us, Reed! Do h'you hear me?! H'it's just the three o' h'us! Three! O'! H'us!" Larkkit narrowed his blue eyes to slits. Wildkit looked away.

"Two of us." He muttered. He didn't seem angry, but merely disappointed. Larkkit *humphed* and padded away. Wildkit gave Reedpaw a sorry glance, but turned to follow Larkkit. "Just two of us, Reed*paw*." Then he turned away and walked with the black tom. Reedpaw stared after them. How could everything have gone so wrong? He looked around. He would find Lunakit and confide in

her. While he was on his way to the she-cat quarters, Cricketkit stopped him.

"What's wrong, Reed?" She asked, resting the tip of her tail on his shoulder. He stopped short. The only other cats to ever call him Reed were Larkkit and Wildkit; they always did that so that the Advisory's ways couldn't get to them. Today was the very first time Wildkit had ever called him Reedpaw, ever. He shook his head to clear his brain.

"Did you just call me 'Reed?'" He looked at her, astonished. She cocked her head.

"Is that wrong? I thought that's what you preferred to be called." She tilted her head even more. "Don't lie, I've seen Lark and Wild call you that. And, besides, most of us hate our full name, because we could be warriors by now." She stopped and looked away. "Did I share too much?"

Reedpaw's eyes were shining. "So Lark, Wild, and I aren't the only ones! More of us think it's unfair! I was right! Hahaha! I was right, Cricket, I was right!" He was practically dancing, and he was ready to race off. "Thanks, *Cricket*, thank you so much! I'll catch you later!" He ran off in the direction that Wildkit and Larkkit had gone in.

He caught up them, out of breath. "Wild, Lark, guess what!"

Wildkit looked at him disdainfully, and Larkkit glared. "H'unless h'you h'are here to h'apologize to h'us, then get h'out o' here!" Larkkit turned away pointedly. Reedpaw sighed.

"No, I'm not here to apologize, but just listen for a moment, please." He waited for a response, but both of them just kept walking. He rolled his eyes and continued anyway. "I ran into Cricket—er, *yeah*, Cricket, and she told me that most of the other cats hate their full name, and shorten it, like us. They wish they were warriors, like they would be in the Clans. If we work together, we could overpower the Advisors and escape to the Clans. Then it could still be the three of us, right? Right?"

Wildkit and Larkkit just looked at him, before walking off. Reedpaw stood, staring after them. *What's wrong with my plan? Why can't they see the logic behind it? Why can't they understand?*

"I'm Getting Soft in My Old Age"

•Willowleaf•

Willowleaf sighed. She missed having Sunpaw in the den. It had been four moons since the young tom had become a warrior apprentice again, and since Brackenstar's death. She was sort of lonely now, even with Barkpelt around. Barkpelt laid the tip of his tail on her shoulder. "Are you alright, Owl?" He asked. She only had this nickname from him because one of the kits awhile ago couldn't say Willowleaf, so they just said 'Owl-leaf.' Ever since then, Barkpelt called her 'Owl.' Willowleaf leaned her head on his shoulder. Barkpelt was like an older brother to her, except he was younger.

"I don't know, Kelp." She replied. This nickname also came from a mispronunciation of a kit, where they called him 'Bark-kelp.' "I don't know if I'm alright." He curled his tail around her, and pulled her closer. "I wish...I mean I...I don't know, Barkpelt, I really don't know if I'm alright. I really don't know."

"That's alright. We all have those days, where we can't decide how we feel. It's really okay." He licked his paw and swiped it across his ears. She purred a little and flicked his ear with her tail. She sighed again and stood up.

"I had better get going. These herbs aren't going to sort themselves, are they now?" She pulled out a pile of marigold and began to separate the old, shriveling herbs from the newer, fresh ones. Beside her, Barkpelt began to sort horsetail and juniper berries.

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Willowleaf padded through the gorse tunnel at the entrance to the

camp, carrying a bundle of fresh herbs in her mouth. Her mouth was watering, because she had picked a little bit of catmint, since Snowkit was refusing to eat coltsfoot for her cough. Willowleaf shook her head. "Kits these days, so soft and ignorant. Kits in my day would be ready for battle at three moons, gulp their herbs like nothing, and go without prey for days." Barkpelt snickered behind her. She sighed. "Okay, that made me sound a lot less old in my head." He laughed again. She smiled, but kept walking to her den. There, she dropped off all the herbs but the catmint and coltsfoot. "Barkpelt, could you put these away?" She called, already on her way to the nursery. He nodded and disappeared into the medicine den.

Willowleaf peeked inside the nursery, but pulled back very quickly when she saw Snowkit hurtling toward the entrance. The little kit skidded to a halt when she saw Willowleaf. She coughed.

"Are you going to make me swallow some nasty herbs again?" She asked, her little pink nose held high in the air. Willowleaf laughed.

"Yes, but if you do it—"

"I won't!" The she-kit declared. Then she coughed again.

"—If you do it, I'll give you a little bit of catmint." She held the catmint under Snowkit's nose, and the calico she-kit sniffed it eagerly.

"Okay, fine." She complied, sniffing the catmint again. Willowleaf passed two small coltsfoot leaves over, and the she-kit growled, but choked them down. Then Willowleaf laid down a small catmint leaf and Snowkit devoured it, licking her lips. "Can I have more?" She asked sweetly. Willowleaf purred.

"Tomorrow." She replied. "You can have some more after you take your herbs tomorrow." Snowkit growled but turned back to the nursery. Then she turned around again.

"But I want more *now*." Snowkit complained. Willowleaf huffed and rolled her eyes.

"Too much catmint makes a cat go crazy." She said, much calmer than she felt. Snowkit cocked her head little calico head, her tail twitching excitedly.

"Really?" The kit practically bounced up and down. Then she coughed. Willowleaf sighed for the third time that day.

"You know what? I'll tell you a story. Would you like that?" She asked. She could tell by the sheer joy on the small kit's face, that that was exactly what she had been hoping for.

"Yes!" Came the reply. Snowkite bounded over, coughed, and promptly curled up against Willowleaf. The latter was taken aback, but the she-kit purred. The medicine cat rolled her eyes again and began her story:

"Once upon a time, when the Clans were in the old forest, there lived a tom named Russetheart. now Russetheart was your average tom—"

"So a little bit stupid?" Snowkit interrupted. Willowleaf nodded and laughed.

"—your average tom medicine cat. Russetheart only became a medicine cat because he loved catmint so much. One day, Russetheart went to fetch some catmint for a kit with greencough. While in the catmint patch, he rolled in it and ate all the leaves but one.

"When he got home, he was acting crazy, and he barely managed to give the kit her catmint without eating it, too. Everyone wondered what had happened to the nice, polite tom. Now, he acted like a demented rabbit, running everywhere, nibbling everything, scared easily. Poor Russetheart would disappear for days at a time, only to be found unconscious in a catmint patch somewhere.

"Eventually, they found him permanently asleep in a field of wild catmint and sunflowers. They all mourned him of course, but they were glad to be rid of his delirium. The end." Willowleaf stood up,

ready to go back to her den, but Snowkit clung to her.

"Please tell me more stories. Please!" The little kit mewed pitifully. Then she cocked her head. "And does 'permanently asleep' mean dead?" She stared suspiciously at the light brown medicine cat. Then she pleaded more. "Please, just one more story? You're such a good storyteller."

Willowleaf could not fight this. She huffed and sat back down. "Fine. One more. Do you want to hear about how the Advisory came to be, or about the legend of Sunflower and Songbird?"

"Both, please!" Snowkit squeaked. Willowleaf shook her head in amusement. Her barrier was crumbling slightly, and this kit was one of the only ones getting through it.

"Alright," she conceded. "I will tell you both of them, then. "We'll start with the Advisory." She settled down, and tucked her paws underneath her. Snowkit climbed onto her back, digging her sharp kit claws into her back. Willowleaf winced, but didn't reprimand her. "Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was a she-cat named Willowsong. She had a litter of four kits, all black as night. Their names were Nightkit, Onyxkit, Obsidiankit, and Ivorykit. I'm sure you've heard the tale of Onyxflame and Obsidianstar?" Willowleaf was taken aback when the calico she-kit shook her head no. "What are they teaching in the nursery these days?! Then I guess you'll be hearing four stories this morning.

"Well, anyway. Nightkit was apprenticed to the medicine cat. We're not completely sure what Clan they were in, but some say it was ThunderClan. Since I don't like maybes, we'll not name a Clan. Anywho, Nightkit became NIghtpaw, training under the watchful eye of a tom named Windbender. Windbender saw how attentive Nightpaw was, and how gifted he was.

"Willowsong thought that Nightpaw should be better than just a normal medicine cat, so she asked Windbender to consult StarClan. Windbender did as she asked, and gave her this prophecy:

"'There will one, dark as night,

Who seeks something greater,
The power to read the stars,
The power to shake the ground,
The power to uncover the lies,
The power to advise.'

"Willowsong wasn't satisfied with his answer, and she set out to make her son better than everyone else. She didn't seem to care much for her other kits, but apparently thought that only Nightpaw was special. Willowsong created a group called the Advisory, and appointed Nightpaw as the first Advisor. She renamed him Nightwhisper, after his quiet nature."

By now, almost the entire Clan was gathered, listening to Willowleaf intently. Willowleaf ignored them, and focused on telling her story.

"He advised Owlstar wisely of course, but he never asked or wanted to be in that placement. Willowsong was killed in battle soon after, and Nightwhisper stepped down from his position. Someone else succeeded him, because they liked the idea of having more power even than the leader of the Clan. This tradition continued, and they became the Advisory as you know it: corrupt control-freaks."

Silence met her words. Then, finally, Lightstar stood up.

"Is that treason I just heard?"

"I Hate Everyone"

•Beetlekit•

Beetlekit stuck his tongue out at yet another cat who gave him a funny look. It bothered him, but he tried to play it cool, and act like it was just a joke. He got up from the ground, and padded off, his tail held high. Several more cats turned away from him as he walked past. *What is wrong you all? What's wrong with* me*?* He pretended to lunge at a ThunderClan kit. The kit squeaked in terror and ran away. Beetlekit snickered a little, until a few elders lying nearby gave him disgusted looks.

These looks hadn't happened much before his father, Brackenstar, had joined StarClan. Were they his father's fault? Beetlekit hated how everyone looked at him. Even Ashflower, when she thought he wasn't looking, gave disgusted and almost frightful looks. But of course Beetlekit saw, and he was hurt. Only two cats didn't look at him like that: Flykit and Waspkit—his brothers. Beetlekit was sick of the looks, and he was sick of the pretending that they weren't disgusted by him.

What had he ever done? Okay, he'd scared a few kits in his fourteen moons in StarClan, but surely that wasn't bad enough for him to be practically *shunned*. Every kit scared the other kits at some point. Even perfect little Flykit had done it a few times. Probably those elders that had given him the Look had scared fellow kits when they had been kits. Beetlekit decided that he was going to call Ashflower out on it and talk to her.

As he made his way to his family's den, he recieved six more Looks and three kits ran away terrified. He ducked his head to enter the den just because it made him feel big and tall. He found that only Ashflower was in the den this morning. Their den was simple; made from twigs and ferns woven together. Five nests dotted the ground.

One was occupied by his mother, Ashflower. Two others carried the scent of his brothers, one was Beetlekit's own, and the last one carried the more unfamiliar scent of his father, the late leader of SkyClan. Beetlekit was still getting used to him being around, even though it had been four moons already.

"Ashflower?" Beetlekit asked tentatively, not knowing if Ashflower was in one of her moods or not. She looked up, fur ruffled from sleep. Good. She wasn't.

"Yes?" She replied. Her voice sounded tired. Beetlekit felt a little guilty for waking her. He shifted his paws a little and sat down.

"I wanted to ask..." He trailed off. Should he really ask Ashflower about it? He took a deep breath. "I wanted to ask why everyone stares at me funny and gives me disgusted looks."

Ashflower recoiled and flinched. "So you've noticed." She murmured. Beetlekit stared. How could he not notice? She looked away before turning back again and continuing. "They...they stare because—Oh, Beetlekit, I can't tell you why. I promised someone, myself, and your father that I would never tell you or your brothers."

"Why did you promise? Who is the 'someone' you promised to?" Beetlekit felt a little annoyed. Why should he not get to know why he got these looks?

"I promised for your own sake. I promised to...someone that I'd rather not think about or talk about." Ashflower looked Beetlekit in the eye. Her green eyes glistened a little, and she glanced away quickly. She curled into a tight little ball in her nest, and refused to say more.

"Ashflower, I have a right to know! I'm the one getting the looks!" He was frustrated and little angry now. Why couldn't she just say the name, the reason, and they'd never speak of it again?

"I promised, Beetle, and I don't intend to break my promise. I shouldn't—I *can't* think of him, Beetle, I can't. I—He's the one who

broke me, Beetle. I'm broken because of him. I can't break you too." Ashflower stared at her paws. Beetlekit could smell the fear rising from her fur.

"*Please,* Ashflower. I need to know. *I* can't keep it cool when I get the Look. It hurts, Ashflower, it really hurts. I can't keep going when everyone pretends that they don't hate me. *I* can't. Forget your promise, and let me make this right, prove that I'm not the reason I get the Look. Please." Beetlekit looked at her pleadingly. Ashflower shook her head firmly.

"No, Beetlekit. I can't." She didn't say anymore, but Beetlekit pleaded anyway.

"Please." He said simply, hoping it was enough. He'd already said his share. Ashflower glared at him a little. He glared right back, matching the intensity in her gaze. She huffed. Beetlekit growled a little. "Please." He repeated.

"Beetlekit, enough. Go play with your brothers. Have fun. Ignore the looks."

"Do you think I haven't tried?" Beetlekit exploded. "You think I haven't tried to ignore the Looks, laugh them off, play it cool? You think I don't pretend not to see them, just as everyone pretends not to give them—even you, Ashflower?" Anger rippled through his fur, making it stand on end. His pelt felt hot with fury, and his hackles raised. "Don't think I haven't seen you give the Look. Don't pretend you don't do it when I'm not looking. I know you do. I've seen you. I've seen everyone do it."

"Beetle—"

"Don't you 'Beetle' me! You have no right to act like everything's okay! You have no right to pretend, to console me, to comfort me. You give the Looks, too. You think what everyone else thinks about me, and you have no right to pretend you don't." Beetlekit backed away from his mother, breathing heavily, fur on end. He glared harder at her, wishing looks could kill. How could his own mother treat him like this?

"Beetle, you don't understand—" She began. Beetlekit cut her off.

"Then let me understand! Tell me!" He yowled. She slunk back into the corner.

"I can't." She whispered. Her ears went back, her tail between her legs. "I can't." Her tail and whiskers quivered. Her paws trembled a little. Beetlekit snorted. He whipped around and stalked out of the den.

"Then I can't call you my mother. I am no longer part of this family." He declared. He ran away from the den, not going anywhere in particular, just away from her. He finally stopped under a large overhanging rock. He cowered, paws shaking from all the emotion he just spilled. He was exhausted now.

"Woah. What happened to you?" A voice said. Beetlekit sniffed the air. The scent smelled strangely familiar. A dark tabby tom stepped out of the shadows. His amber eyes shone in the light. Beetlekit took a step back, teeth bared, ears back. He bushed out his fur to make himself look bigger.

"Who are you?" He asked tentatively. The tom smirked a little. He sat down, wrapping his tail around his paws.

"My name is Darkmist." He said. The name rang a little bell in the back of Beetlekit's mind. He couldn't place where he'd heard the name before.

"My name is Beetlekit." He replied. He sat down opposite the strange tom. It occurred to him that he looked just like this large tom in front of him. Were they somehow related?

"May I ask why you were running, Beetlekit?" He asked politely. He had a strangely calm air about him. It almost made Beetlekit nervous, but it strangely consoled him.

"My mother and I fought. I said that I was no longer part of the family and then I ran." Beetlekit's pelt felt a little hot with

embarrassment. His reason seemed a little stupid now. Darkmist didn't seem to think so, however. His eyes harbored something that almost looked like pride.

"Good for you." He said simply. "May I also ask how you died?"

"I was stillborn." Beetlekit replied. It felt a little weird to talk about his death when he was right here.

"Oh." Darkmist murmured. "Wouldn't it be nice to have a chance to live?" He glanced at the small tom slyly. Beetlekit nodded vigorously.

"Yes, yes it would be." He answered. Darkmist's eyes glinted.

"I have a proposition for you, Beetlekit. There's only a small payment for a small gift for you. Would you like to hear more?"

"Yes, please." Beetlekit said quickly. He leaned closer to listen to the strange dark tom.